



CHAPTER XIX.

## The Hollow of Her Hand.

When Booth called in the afternoon at Sara's apartment, he was met by the news that she was quite ill and could see no one—not even him. The doctor had been summoned during the night and had returned in the morning, to find that she had a very high temperature. The butler could not enlighten Booth further than this, except to add that a nurse was coming in to take charge of Mrs. Wrاندall, more for the purpose of watching her symptoms than for anything else, he believed. At least, so the doctor had said.

Two days passed before the distressed young man could get any definite news concerning her condition. He unconsciously began to think of it as a malady, not a mere illness, due of course to a remark Carroll had dropped when Sara had told him the whole truth of the tragedy and of her own vindictive plans. It was Carroll himself who gave a definite report of Sara. He met the lawyer coming away from the apartment when he called to inquire.

"She isn't out of her head, or anything like that," said Carroll uneasily, "but she's in a bad way, Booth. I'll tell you what I think is troubling her more than anything else. Down in her heart she realizes that Hetty Castleton has got to be brought face to face with the Wrاندalls."

"The deuce you say!"

"Today I saw her for the first time. Almost immediately she asked me if I thought the Wrاندalls would treat Hetty fairly if they ever found out the truth about her. I said I thought they would. I didn't have the heart to tell her that their grievance undoubtedly would be shifted from Hetty to her, and that they wouldn't be likely to forgive her for the stand she'd taken. She doesn't seem to care, however, what the Wrاندalls think of her. By the way, have you any influence over Hetty Castleton?"

"I wish I were sure that I had," said Booth.

"Do you think she would come if you sent her a cablegram?"

"I am going over—"

"She will have your letter in a couple of days, according to Sara, who seems to have a very faithful correspondent in the person of that maid. I shudder to think of the cable tolls in the past few months! I sometimes wonder if the maid suspects anything more than a loving interest in Miss Castleton. What I was about to suggest is this: Couldn't you cable her on Friday saying that Sara is very ill? This is Tuesday."

"I will cable, of course, but Sara must not know that I've done it."

"Can you come to my office tomorrow afternoon?"

"Yes. Tomorrow night I shall go over to Philadelphia, to be gone till Friday. I hope it will not be necessary for me to stay longer. You never can tell about these operations."

"I trust everything will go well, Brandon."

Several things of note transpired before noon on Friday.

The Wrاندalls arrived from Europe, without the recalcitrant colonel. Mr. Redmond Wrاندall, who met them at the dock, heaved a sigh of relief.

"He will be over on the Lusitania, next sailing," said Leslie, who for some reason best known to himself wore a troubled look.

Mr. Wrاندall's face fell. "I hope not," he said, much to the indignation



He Met the Lawyer Coming Away From the Apartment.

of his wife and the secret uneasiness of his son. "These predatory connections of the British nobility—"

"Predatory!" gasped Mrs. Wrاندall. "—are a blood-sucking lot," went on the old gentleman firmly. "If he comes to New York, Leslie, I'll stake my head he won't be long in borrowing a few thousand dollars from each of us. And he'll not seek to humiliate us by attempting to pay it back. Oh, I know them."

Leslie swallowed rather hard. "What's the news here, dad?" he asked hastily. "Anybody dead?"

"Sara is quite ill, I hear. Slow fever of some sort, Carroll tells me."

"Is she going to marry Brandy Booth?" asked his son.

Mr. Wrاندall's face stiffened. "I fear I was a little hasty in my conclusions. Brandon came to the office a few days ago and informed me in rather plain words that there is absolutely nothing in the report."

"The deuce you say! 'Gad, I wrote her a rather intimate letter—' Leslie got no farther than this. He was somewhat stunned and bewildered by his private reflections.

Mr. Wrاندall was lost in study for some minutes, paying no attention to the remarks of the other occupants of the motor that whirled them across town.

"By the way, my dear," he said to his wife, a trifle irrelevantly, "don't you think it would be right for you and Vivian to drop in this afternoon and see Sara? Just to let her know that she isn't without—"

"It's out of the question, Redmond," said his wife, a shocked expression in her face as much as to say that he must be quite out of his head to suggest such a thing. "We shall be dreadfully busy for several days, unpacking and—well, doing all sorts of necessary things."

"She is pretty sick, I hear," mumbled he.

"Hasn't she got a nurse?" demanded his wife.

"I merely offered the suggestion in order—"

"Well, we'll see her next week. Any other news?"

"Mrs. Booth, Brandon's mother, was operated on for something or other day before yesterday."

"Oh, dear! The poor thing! Where?"

"Philadelphia, of course."

"I wonder if—let me see, Leslie, isn't there a good train to Philadelphia at four o'clock? I could go—"

"Really, my dear," said her husband sharply.

"You forget how busy we are, mother," said Vivian, without a smile.

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Wrاندall, in considerable confusion. "Was it a serious operation, Redmond?"

"They cut a bone out of her nose, that's all. Brandon says her heart is weak. They were afraid of the ether. She's all right, Carroll says."

"Goodness!" cried Mrs. Wrاندall. One might have suspected a note of disappointment in her voice.

"I shall go up to see Sara this afternoon," said Vivian calmly. "What's the number of her new apartment?"

"You have been up to see her, of course," said Mrs. Wrاندall acidly.

He fidgeted. "I didn't hear of her illness until yesterday."

"I'll go up with you, Viv," said Leslie.

"No, you won't," said his sister flatly. "I'm going to apologize to her for something I said to Brandon Booth. You needn't tag along, Les."

At half-past five in the afternoon, the Wrاندall limousine stopped in front of the tall apartment building near the park, a footman jerked open the door, and Miss Wrاندall stepped out.

At the same moment a telegraph messenger boy paused on the sidewalk to compute the artistic but puzzling numerals on the imposing grilles of the building.

Miss Wrاندall had herself announced by the obsequious doorman, and stood by in patience to wait for the absurd rule of the house to be carried out: "No one could get in without being announced from below," said the doorman.

"I can get in all right, all right," said the messenger boy, "I got a telegram for de lady."

"Go to the rear!" exclaimed the doorman, with some energy.

While Miss Wrاندall waited in Sara's reception hall on the tenth floor, the messenger, having traversed a more devious route, arrived with his message.

Watson took the envelope and told him to wait. Five minutes passed. Miss Wrاندall grew very uncomfortable under the persistent though complimentary gaze of the street urchin.

He stared at her, wide-eyed and admiring, his tribute to the glorious. She stared back occasionally, narrow-eyed and reproving, her tribute to the grotesque.

"Will you please step into the drawing-room, Miss Wrاندall," said Watson, returning. He led her across the small foyer and threw open a door. She passed into the room beyond.

Then he turned to the boy who stood beside the hall seat, making change for a quarter as he approached. "Here," he said, handing him the receipt book and a dime, "that's for you." He dropped the quarter into his own pocket, where it mingled with coins that were strangers to it up to that instant, and imperiously closed the door behind the boy who failed to say "thank you." Every man to his trade!

There was a woman in the drawing-room when Vivian entered, standing well over against the windows with her back to the light. The visitor stopped short in surprise. She had expected to find her sister-in-law in bed, attended by a politely superior person in pure white.

"Why, Sara," she began, "I am so glad to see you are up and—"

The other woman came forward.

"But I am not Sara, Miss Wrاندall,"

she said, in a well-remembered voice. "How do you do?"

Vivian found herself looking into the face of Hetty Castleton. Instantly she extended her hand.

"This is a surprise!" she exclaimed. "When did you return? Leslie told me your plans were quite settled when he saw you in Lucerne. Oh, I see! Of course! How stupid of me. Sara sent for you."

"She has been quite ill," said Hetty, non-committally. "We got in yesterday. I thought my place was here, naturally."

"Naturally," repeated Vivian, in a detached sort of way. "How is she today? May I see her?"

"She is very much better. In fact, she is sitting up in her room." A warm flush suffused her face, a shy smile appeared in her eyes. "She is receiving

two gentlemen visitors, to be perfectly honest, Miss Wrاندall, her lawyer, Mr. Carroll, and—Mr. Booth."

They were seated side by side on the uncomfortable Louis Seize divan in the middle of the room.

"Perhaps she won't care to see me, after an audience so fatiguing," said Miss Wrاندall sweetly. "And so exasperating," she added, with a smile.

Hetty looked her perplexity.

"But she will see you, Miss Wrاندall—if you don't mind waiting. It is a business conference they're having."

An ironic gleam appeared in the corner of Vivian's eye. "Oh," she said, and waited. Hetty smiled uncertainly. All at once the tall American girl was impressed by the wistful, almost humble look in the Englishwoman's eyes, an appealing look that caused her to wonder not a little. Like a flash she jumped at an obvious conclusion, and almost caught her breath. This girl loved Booth and was losing him! Vivian exulted for a moment and then, with an impulse she could not quite catalogue, laid her hand on the other's slim fingers, and murmured somewhat hazily: "Never mind, never mind!"

"Oh, you must wait," cried Hetty, not at all in touch with the other's mood. "Sara expects to see you. The men will be out in a few minutes."

"I think I will run in tomorrow morning," said Vivian hastily. She arose almost immediately and again extended her hand. "So glad to see you back again, Miss Castleton. Come and see me. Give my love to Sara."

She took her departure in some haste, and in her heart she was rejoicing that she had not succeeded in making a fool of herself by confessing to Sara that she had said unkind things about her to Brandon Booth.

Hetty resumed her seat in the broad French window and stared out over the barren treetops in the park. A frightened, pathetic droop returned to her lips. It had been there most of the day.

In Sara's boudoir, the doors of which were carefully closed, three persons were in close, even repressed conference. The young mistress of the house sat propped up in a luxurious chaise-louche, wan but intense. Confronting her were the two men, leaning forward in their chairs. Mr. Carroll held in his hand a number of papers, prominent among them being three or four telegrams. Booth's face was radiant despite the serious matter that occupied his mind. He had reached town early in the morning in response to a telephone message from Carroll announcing the sudden, unannounced appearance of Hetty Castleton at his offices on the previous afternoon. The girl's arrival had been most unexpected. She walked in on Mr. Carroll, accompanied by her maid, who had a distinctly sheepish look in her eyes and seemed eager to explain something but could not find the opportunity.

With some firmness, Miss Castleton had asked Mr. Carroll to explain why the woman had been set to spy upon her every moment, a demand the worthy lawyer could not well meet for the good and sufficient reason that he wasn't very clear about it himself. Then Hetty broke down and cried, confessing that she was eager to go to Mrs. Wrاندall, at the same time sobbing out something about a symbolic dicky-bird, much to Mr. Carroll's wonder and perplexity.

He sent the maid from the room,

and retired with Miss Castleton to the innermost of his private offices, where without much preamble he informed her that he knew everything. Moreover, Mr. Booth was in possession of all the facts and was even then on the point of starting for Europe to see her. Of course, his letter had failed to reach her in time. There was quite a tragic scene in the seclusion of that remote little office, during which Mr. Carroll wiped his eyes and blew his nose more than once, after which he took it upon himself to dispatch a messenger to Sara with the word that he and Miss Castleton would present themselves within half an hour after his note had been delivered.

The meeting between Sara and Hetty was affecting. . . . Almost immediately the former began to show the most singular signs of improvement. She laughed and cried and joyously announced to the protesting nurse that she was feeling quite well again! And, in truth, she got up from the couch on which she reclined and insisted on being dressed for dinner. In another room the amazed nurse was frantically appealing to Mr. Carroll to let her send for the doctor, only to be confounded by his urbane announcement that Mrs. Wrاندall was as "right as a string" and, please God, she wouldn't need the services of doctor or nurse again for years to come. Then he asked the nurse if she had ever heard of a disease called "nostalgia."

She said she had heard of "homesickness."

"Well, that's what ailed Mrs. Wrاندall," he said. "Miss Castleton is the cure."

Booth came the next morning. Even as she lay passive in his arms, Hetty denied him. Her arms were around his neck as she miserably whispered that she could not, would not be his wife, notwithstanding her love for him and his readiness to accept her as she was. She was obdurate, lovingly, tenderly obdurate. He would have despaired but for Sara, to whom he afterwards appealed.

"Wait," was all that Sara had said, but he took heart. He was beginning to look upon her as a sorceress. A week ago he had felt sorry for her; his heart had been touched by her transparent misery. Today he saw her in another light altogether; as the determined, resourceful, calculating woman who, having failed to attain a certain end, was now intensely, keenly interested in the development of another of a totally different nature. He could not feel sorry for her today.

Hetty deliberately had placed herself in their hands, withdrawing from the conference shortly before Vivian's arrival to give herself over to gloomy conjectures as to the future, not only for herself, but for the man she loved and the woman she worshiped with something of the fidelity of a beaten dog.

At a later conference participated in by Sara, Booth and Mr. Carroll, the old lawyer spoke plainly.

"Now are you both willing to give serious consideration to the plan I propose? Take time to think it over. No harm will come to Miss Castleton, I am confident. There will be a nine days' sensation, but, after all, it is the best thing for everybody. You propose living abroad, Booth, so what are the odds if—"

"I shan't live abroad unless Hetty reconsiders her decision to not marry me," said the young man dismally.

"Gad, Sara, you must convince her that I love her better than—"

"I think she knows all that, Brandon. As I said before, wait! And now, Mr. Carroll, I have this to say to your suggestion: I for one am relentlessly opposed to the plan you advocate. There is no occasion for this matter to go to the public. A trial, you say, would be a mere formality. I am not so sure of that. Why put poor Hetty's head in the lion's mouth at this late stage, after I have protected her so carefully all these months? Why, take the risk? We know she is innocent. Isn't it enough that we acquit her in our hearts? No, I cannot consent, and I hold both of you to your promises."

"There is nothing more I can say, my dear Sara," said Carroll, shaking his head gloomily, "except to urge you to think it over very seriously. Remember, it may mean a great deal to her—and to our eager young friend here. Years from now, like a bolt from the sky, the truth may come out in some way. Think of what it would mean then."

Sara regarded him steadily. "There are but four people who know the truth," she said slowly. "It isn't likely that Hetty or Brandon will tell the story. Professional honor forbids your doing so. That leaves me as the sole peril. Is that what you would imply, my dear friend?"

"Not at all!" he cried hastily, "not at all. I—"

"That's all tommy-rot, Sara," cried Booth earnestly. "We just couldn't have anything to fear from you."

With curious inconsistency, she shook her head and remarked: "Of course, you never could be quite easy in your minds. There would always be the feeling of unrest. Am I to be trusted, after all? I have proved myself to be a vindictive schemer. What assurance can you and Hetty have that

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